

CITY OF ABERDEEN
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

A meeting of the Aberdeen Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m., October 12, 2011, in the Council Chambers by Chairman Swisher.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Joe Swisher, Commissioners Bill Braerman, Karen Heavey, Nancy Kosko, Terri Preston, and Mark Schlottman.

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilwoman Sandra Landbeck, City Council liaison Phyllis Grover, Director of Planning & Community Development
Matt Lapinsky, Public Works Director
Gil Jones, Recording Secretary

The minutes of the September 14, 2011, meeting were approved, with one change - an addition of the question asked by Mrs. Kosko of Councilwoman Landbeck concerning Plan Maryland.

AGENDA ITEMS:

1. **Review Preliminary Site Plan for Aberdeen Exchange, Lot 4**
Location: Off MD Route 715 and US Route 40 at Newton Road.

Representatives: Amy DiPietro, Morris & Ritchie Associates (MRA) and Brian Norris, Chief Operating Officer, Cherry Cove, site developer.

Ms. DiPietro gave a power point presentation highlighting aspects of the project. She indicated this property would be designed by FRCH, an architectural company that specializes in hospitality architecture. This project is one-half mile from the MD 715 gate of Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG). The preliminary plan was approved in 2008, with hotels a principal permitted use in this zoning (B-3). The plan was reviewed by the Aberdeen Architectural Review Committee (ARC) on September 29 and a copy of their minutes was distributed to the Planning Commission. Total parking required is 109, which has been provided. There will be no meeting rooms, banquet facilities, or restaurants on the premises. The landscape plan was reviewed and meets all requirements. Primary access will be off Newton Road, with secondary access provided through adjoining Lot 3, and interior sidewalks provided to connect to other proposed uses in the area, including an outside walking trail. Water will be provided via an 8-inch water line, with additional 8-inch gravity sewer service. The ground slopes from Route 40 and Newton Road back to the stormwater management (SWM) facility. This facility (pond) will be in an open space area.

The project will be a 5-story hotel with 107 rooms and a 13,600 square foot first floor footprint.

Home 2 Suites by Hilton is a new brand from Hilton, serving the extended stay traveling professional. There are currently 14 Home 2 properties nationwide, with another 54 approved for construction. Hilton projects there to be 100 in operation by the end of 2012. Each suite is approximately 320 square feet. The hotel also features an indoor pool, outdoor patio with gas grills, exercise room, business center, and appointed lobby with a corner mart and gathering area. The project is seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver status. The forest conservation areas, wetland areas, and SWM pond are to be included on-site for easier maintenance.

Mr. Swisher asked if the developer currently owns the pond. Ms. DiPietro said they will eventually, but do not at the present time. Mr. Norris said the reason they want to own the pond is that they will have a \$14 million asset in the hotel and want to be able to maintain the pond and its appearance, and have a trail around it. Mr. Swisher asked if the expense of pond maintenance would be shared with the owners of the other lots. Mr. Norris said yes, but that the maintenance itself would be conducted by his company.

Mrs. Grover said her comments had been sent to Ms. DiPietro would be addressed on a revised plan to be submitted at a later date. Those comments include corrected owner information; status and parking requirements for banquet rooms, if any; addition of Lot 4 and open space to the description; a note indicating that the project is in the Downtown Overlay District; and a note indicating cross easements across Lots 1 and 3 will be required. Mrs. Grover also indicated the Planning Commission had been given a copy of the ARC minutes.

Mr. Lapinsky said Public Works comments had been sent to Ms. DiPietro and all have been satisfied and incorporated into this plan.

Mrs. Heavey asked about the size of the hotel. Ms. DiPietro said the footprint is 13,600 square feet and there would be 5 floors, for a total building square footage of 68,000. Mrs. Heavey also asked if the 5 handicapped spaces were included in the overall parking total of 109. Ms. DiPietro said they were. Mrs. Grover indicated the number of required handicapped parking spaces is outlined in the International Building Code. Ms. DiPietro added that in order to get LEED credit, the amount of parking cannot exceed what is required by code.

Mrs. Heavey asked if water usage was taken into consideration. Ms. DiPietro said the calculation rates are determined by the Maryland Department of the Environment and they have to go with that number for a hotel. Mrs. Heavey asked if there were any City of Aberdeen code differentiation per hotels. Mrs. Grover said there is not.

Mrs. Heavey asked if the SWM pond construction would take place at the same time as that of the hotel. Ms. DiPietro said it would and the pond would collect for all sites in that subdivision.

Mrs. Kosko confirmed that the plan approved in 2008 was for the subdivision, not a site plan.

Ms. Preston asked if the proposed trail would be lighted. Mr. Norris said it is designed to be closed at dark, open from sunrise to sunset. Mr. Norris also spoke to the questions of parking and water usage. He said, in terms of parking and experience at his other hotels, companies will often send two to three of their workers in one car, so parking is saved in that way. As for water, and in order to receive LEED certification, the dual flush toilets use one-half of the water and all of the

fixtures are of the water-saving variety. The overall water usage is greatly reduced compared to that of a standard, non-LEED hotel.

Mr. Braerman thought this to be a good project, but expressed concern over how to get to the site, that it's not easily accessed off Route 40. Mr. Norris felt that due to the nature of the hotel and its usual customers, same-day business would probably be very minimal. Most guests will have room reservations and directions within that reservation. He too expressed some concern over signage and access to Old Philadelphia Road, but feels a 5-story building will be very visible. In other hotels of this type they tend to see repeat business returning to work in the area.

Mr. Schlottman asked about the average length of stay for a given guest. Mr. Norris said projected stay is considered 7 nights or longer, however his average length of stay is about 26 nights. This is based on the experience with his properties at Patuxent River Naval Air Station. He expects that many of those who travel there for business will also be coming to APG as well. Councilwoman Landbeck indicated she has experience at extended stay properties and it's obvious most customers are regulars and stay for multiple nights. Mr. Norris said such properties tend to take much less abuse than the more traditional transient products.

Mr. Schlottman asked if the property would be owned or managed by Cherry Cove. Mr. Norris said they would do both. The ownership entity would be known as Aberdeen Hotel Partners LLC.

Mr. Swisher asked what name would appear on the marquee. Mr. Norris said it would be Home 2 Suites by Hilton and would appear on 3 sides of the building. Mr. Norris said that per Hilton requirements there is no "rear" to the hotel per se, that all sides need to be attractive, no one side more so than another.

Mr. Swisher indicated the SWM pond was set up to take care of at least two or three lots and asked how they would allocate support from the lots they don't own. Mr. Norris said the adjacent property owner, IDGAD, has agreed to cross easements and SWM easements, and that they are required to reimburse his company for maintenance. In turn, the hotel will provide them access to the pond for their SWM flow.

Mrs. Kosko asked if there would be government rates charged for the rooms. Mr. Norris said government rates would apply to government employees and enlisted personnel on government business, but not necessarily for contractors.

Ms. Preston asked about the resistance from Hilton to this location as referred to in the ARC minutes. Mr. Norris said this resistance was due to the proximity of the block plant and the overall makeup of the neighborhood (there were several abandoned houses on the site at the time of the Hilton representative's visit). However, the immediate area has changed and continues to change due to the effects of BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure).

Mrs. Kosko asked what EIFS referred to. Mr. Norris indicated this stands for exterior insulated finish system, a common commercial finish similar in appearance to stucco.

Motion by Mr. Schlottman, seconded by Mr. Braerman, to approve the Preliminary Site Plan for Aberdeen Exchange Lot 4, incorporating staff comments and the revised preliminary site plan to be submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Review of Chapter 470, Streets and Sidewalks – Update

Mrs. Grover acknowledged receipt of comments from Mrs. Heavey. There will be a meeting on October 28 with various engineers from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to get their ideas on road and sidewalk issues from a development perspective. Mrs. Grover will brief the Commission on the outcome of that meeting in November.

In response to a question from Mrs. Heavey about open sections roads, Mr. Lapinsky indicated this type of road is one without curb and gutter. He also spoke about various aspects of “green” roads and of things along these lines done in other areas, especially Montgomery County, and has asked the engineers invited to the October 28 meeting to come with ideas. Mr. Lapinsky cautioned that various regulatory requirements, especially relating to SWM and its impact on roads, will play a role, perhaps a major one, in the amendment of this Code.

3. Brief overview of the Aberdeen Station Area – Transit Oriented Development Master Plan

Mrs. Grover advised there would be a presentation in the Council chambers on October 13 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on the Aberdeen train station area master plan. The meeting is sponsored by the City and the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). Brochures describing transit oriented development (TOD) were distributed to the Commission members. Mrs. Grover also advised the Commission that the implementation of the TOD plan would likely result in the need to amend the Development Code and perhaps make some changes in zoning as well.

Mr. Swisher asked if this plan speaks to the current train station. Mrs. Grover said that it does. The other station possibilities were discounted due to cost.

Mrs. Kosko referred to the Comprehensive Plan and the train station summary found in the Transportation Element of said plan. She encouraged everyone to attend the meeting and felt this potential enhancement should have been seriously considered years ago. Additional discussion ensued over various transportation issues currently facing the City.

Mrs. Heavey asked if the presentations to be given at 4:15 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. were essentially the same. Mrs. Grover said they are.

4. Brief overview of the Comprehensive Zoning Review Process and Timeline

Mrs. Grover indicated that since the Comprehensive Plan has been adopted, it is time to do a comprehensive zoning review. Mrs. Grover distributed a brief overview of the process. The process will be commenced the end of October, to be included on the Commission agenda for December 2011. The last comprehensive rezoning took place between 1997 and 1999. Since

then, there have only been sectional map amendments. When that is completed, the Development and Sign Codes will come up for amendment next, as changes in those documents are also needed and all of these elements tie in together.

Mrs. Grover asked that Commission comments on the draft rezoning form be sent to her by the end of October. Mr. Swisher feels December consideration may be early. Mrs. Grover said she will send this form out and is hoping for consideration in December.

Ms. Preston asked how many property owners have inquired about being rezoned. Mrs. Grover said there have been four so far.

5. Other business

Councilwoman Landbeck reviewed recent actions of and items before the City Council. The Preliminary Site Plan for North Gate Lot B was approved by the Council. Changing Hands for Humanity will be making a presentation at the October 17 Council work meeting. She doesn't know what they have in mind, but she will advise the Council as to the Commission's action on their rezoning request as previously presented in August. The City has won a \$2.5 million award as a result of the MTBE settlement. Two of the three bond rating companies have returned their determination of the City's credit worthiness and came back with ratings of AA. The Maryland Citizen Planners Association conference will be in Easton on November 9 and 10. In closing, Councilwoman Landbeck thanked Mrs. Grover for her work on the TOD project.

There being no further business or public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Planning Commission Chairman

Recording Secretary

Date of Approval